



An artist drawing graffiti on a wall on the Dhaka University campus yesterday. Inset, the premises of the Central Shaheed Minar being cleaned ahead of the International Mother Language Day on February 21.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Sufferings as AL blocks Natore road for minister

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Hundreds in Natore suffered yesterday as the local Awami League (AL) blocked off vehicular movement on some three-kilometres of a road from noon until evening to hold a rally according to a reception to Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader. Obaidul rebuked the local leaders for choosing the spot and turned down a Tk 40,000 replica boat, the party's election symbol, made of silver and accepted one created with flowers, urging activists to work for people instead of pleasing leaders. Natore AL General Secretary Shafiqul Islam Shimul said they thought most people would be at home since it was a weekend. The venue, Station Bazar area to the Madrasa intersection, is in Kanaikhali, the heart of the district. Auto-rickshaw driver Firoz Hossain said the bar reduced his daily earnings while one pedestrian Sumaiya Khatun said she had to walk three kilometres for the low number of public transport. "How will people respect a party if it creates sufferings for people?" said Sumaiya.

Argentine ex-army chief held over dictatorship crimes

AFP, Buenos Aires

The commander of Argentina's armed forces from 2013 to 2015, Cesar Milani, was arrested Friday over his alleged involvement in two kidnappings during the country's brutal military dictatorship. Milani was arrested after being questioned over the 1977 kidnappings of Pedro Adan Olivera and his son Ramon Alfredo Olivera, said Delfor Brizuela, the human rights ombudsman for the northwestern province of La Rioja, where the retired general was detained. The Oliveras say they were abducted and tortured by Milani and his men for alleged involvement in a leftist militant organization -- part of the 1976-1983 regime's "dirty war" on its opponents and their alleged collaborators.

Some 30,000 people were killed or disappeared under military rule. Milani, 62, has long been accused by human rights groups of involvement in dictatorship-era crimes. His appointment as army chief by former president Cristina Kirchner in 2013 drew outcry from some activists.

Southern California hit by massive storm

AFP, Los Angeles

One of the strongest storms in years pounded California on Friday, forcing the evacuation of hundreds of people from their homes, causing power outages and prompting flight delays and cancellations. Los Angeles fire officials said one person was electrocuted after a tree downed a power line and several people stranded near the Los Angeles River had to be rescued with inflatable boats.

Trump heads to Florida to reconnect with his base

AFP, Palm Beach

President Donald Trump was set to bask in the adulation of supporters yesterday as he holds a campaign-style rally in Florida, reconnecting with his base outside Washington after a stormy first month in office. "Looking forward to the Florida rally tomorrow. Big crowd expected!" the Republican leader tweeted Friday evening. Following a grievance-filled press conference that raised questions about his temperament, the real estate mogul is getting back to basics and back on script. On Friday, he visited a Boeing plant in South Carolina and pitched himself as a champion of US jobs and industry.

"As your president, I'm going to do everything I can to unleash the power of the American spirit and to put our great people back to work," Trump said. "This is our mantra, 'buy American and hire American.' We want products made in America, made by American hands," he said, pledging to wean the country off imports. On the campaign trail, Trump tapped a rich seam of unease among American workers. Although the unemployment rate is at a low five percent and wages are rising steadily, a triple whammy of deindustrialization, globalization and automation has battered the US heartland. Trump repeatedly touted his business acumen and promised to transfer boardroom smarts to the Oval Office in order to bring back jobs. But poor management and scandal have plagued his first month in office. In four tumultuous weeks, Trump has seen his national security advisor ousted, a cabinet nominee withdraw, a centerpiece immigration policy fail in the courts and a tidal wave of damaging leaks. The perception of a White House in disarray was further fueled as Trump's pick to replace national security advisor Michael Flynn turned down the job, leaving a glaring hole in the

National Security Council.

Trump said Friday he was considering new candidates.

The president was spending his third consecutive weekend at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, and on Saturday he heads north to Melbourne, near Orlando, for a rally at 5 pm (2200 GMT).

The event will likely be reminiscent of his campaign trail appearances, with his cheering supporters providing a boost to Trump after he was frozen out by significant portions of the Washington establishment.

Trump was already on the offensive Friday evening. A day after a rambling press conference in which he blamed journalists for his administration's troubles, Trump tweeted that "FAKE NEWS media" was the "enemy of the American People," naming several prominent outlets.

The commander-in-chief appeared to be in his element at Boeing, praising the roll-out of the 787-10, touring the cockpit and joking with CEO Dennis Muilenburg about negotiations for an order of F-18 Super Hornets.

"We are looking seriously at a big order, and we will see how that -- you know, the problem is that Dennis is a very, very tough negotiator. But I think we may get there," he said.

The US manufacturer employs some 7,500 people in South Carolina, where it has invested more than \$2 billion since beginning operations in the southeastern state in 2009.

Trump's prescription to drain the pockets of economic malaise that dot the country has been to rip up "bad trade deals" and impose tougher tariffs on imports.

"It has to be much easier to manufacture in our country and much harder to leave. I don't want companies leaving our country. Making their product, selling it back, no tax, no nothing, firing everybody in our country," he said.

That may be a winning approach politically, but few economists believe it would be good for Americans' pocket books.

AL wins 1st polls

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BNP candidate Omar Ali won 1,798 votes, according to the returning officer.

No incident of irregularities or violence was reported during voting hours from 8:00am to 4:00pm though Omar and Aziz brought allegation of "subtle rigging".

This correspondent visited nine polling stations and found a large numbers of voters were waiting in queues for casting votes.

"We are pleased to see a peaceful election atmosphere," said Shantimoy Chakma, a voter at Babupara Community Centre, around 11:00am.

In the election, three candidates vied for the mayoral post and 31 for 12 posts of councillor.

AL's Jafor Ali told reporters that it was a peaceful election and the security measures were satisfactory.

However, BNP's Omar Ali and independent candidate Azizur Rahman

while talking to journalists after voting alleged that "subtle rigging" took place in some polling stations.

Amir Khosru, additional superintendent of police in Rangamati, said the election was held peacefully and all parties and people cooperated.

President Abdul Hamid on February 6 appointed KM Nurul Huda as the new chief election commissioner. The new commission led by Huda took oath on February 15.

This commission will oversee the 2019 national polls.

A series of elections are scheduled to be held in the coming weeks.

Parliamentary by-polls to Gaibandha-1 constituency will be held on March 22. The by-elections to Sunamganj-2, the constituency that fell vacant after the death of AL leader Suranjit Sengupta, and the elections to Comilla City Corporation would take place soon.

China says ready to engage with US

AFP, Beijing

Foreign Minister Wang Yi of China told his US counterpart Rex Tillerson that Beijing was ready to work with the Trump administration, according to a Chinese account of their meeting in Bonn.

Wang and Tillerson met on Friday at a G20 gathering of foreign ministers -- the highest-level Sino-US encounter since President Donald Trump was elected.

Trump had infuriated Beijing by calling into question Washington's long-standing "One China" policy, but later reaffirmed it in a conciliatory phone call to Chinese President Xi Jinping last week.

Wang told Tillerson this consensus on the issue "created the necessary pre-conditions for the two nations to engage in strategic cooperation on bilateral, regional, and global issues," said a Chinese foreign ministry statement issued late Friday.

"Wang said that China and the United States, both shouldering the responsibilities of securing world stability and enhancing global prosperity, had more common interests than disputes," the statement went on.

"China is ready to work with the US side to implement the consensus reached between President Xi and President Trump, and move the bilateral relationship forward in the direction that features no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation."

Wang added that the two sides should increase communication and cooperation "to ensure greater development of bilateral relations during Trump's presidency."

The "One China" policy is an acknowledgement that Taiwan is not separate from mainland China.

Trump's telephone call with Taiwan's president after his November election victory infuriated Beijing, which saw it as a repudiation of the "One China" policy.

Wang's attendance at the G20 foreign ministers' meeting seemed in doubt in the fallout, but after Trump's call with Xi, it was announced that the trip would go ahead.

Taiwan has been ruled separately since Mao Zedong's communists ousted China's Nationalists who fled to the island in 1949.

On the campaign trail, Trump regularly attacked China for stealing American jobs and running a massive, unfair trade surplus that he vowed to reverse.

Ancient

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The deputy director of the district's horticulture centre Dr Saifur Rahman says that old trees transpire huge amounts of water through their leaves, which contributes to rainfall. It also provides oxygen, improves air quality and preserves soil, as well as supporting wildlife.

Shahidul Huda Alok, a committee member of the local environment group Save the Nature, notes the tree still provides fruit as well, and as the heart of the area's ecosystem, the forest department should take initiative to protect it.

Indeed, fifteen years ago the then-deputy commissioner for Chapainawabganj, Nurul Haque, planned to establish an eco-park around the tree, with road construction, electrification and forestation to follow. So far, only a signboard has been placed there.

Meat pricier

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5:00pm, he added. The meat traders went on strike on Monday, protesting overcharging of fees (hasil) by the lessee at the Gabtoli cattle market, the prime source of red meat in Dhaka.

This left city dwellers in trouble, specially the crisis deepened at the weekend when the demand is usually high.

Robiul said for the traders, the toll fixed by the city corporation is Tk 50 for a cow, Tk 70 for a buffalo, and Tk 15 for a goat or a ram but traders have been paying between Tk 200 and Tk 5,000 in toll for each animal over the last nine months.

Most of them couldn't make profit due to "excessive toll collection" by the lessee, he alleged.

Robiul demanded the government take step to legalise import of cattle

from Bhutan, India, Myanmar and Nepal and take action against "the corrupt officials" of the DNCC, who were allegedly letting the injustice to happen.

Besides, he alleged a syndicate of the tannery owners, who did not move their factory from Hazaribagh to Savar yet, controlled the price of raw hide.

He said they have to sell a raw hide of cow for Tk 200 to Tk 1,000 as opposed to the previous price of Tk 4,000 and 5,000 per piece. For this reason, price of red meat also increased, he added.

"The government can meet our two demands -- cancellation of the lease of Gabtoli Cattle Market for violating the contact by overcharging and remove the corrupt officials of DNCC -- very easily."

"If these two demands are met, the price of red meat will come down," he added.

Most destructive

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later painted crimson and engraved with Hitler's name, the relic was found in the Nazi leader's Berlin bunker in 1945 following the regime's defeat.

Auction house Alexander Historical Auctions estimates its worth between \$200,000 and \$300,000.

On Sunday, the company, located in the eastern US coastal state of Maryland, will auction off more than a thousand items -- including the Siemens rotary telephone embossed with a swastika and the eagle symbolic of the Third Reich.

Alexander House dubbed the phone -- which Hitler received from the Wehrmacht, Nazi Germany's armed forces -- as "arguably the most destructive 'weapon' of all time, which sent millions to their deaths."

It said Hitler used it to give most of his orders during the last two years of World War II.

Russian officers gifted the device to British Brigadier Sir Ralph Rayner during a tour of the bunker shortly after Germany's surrender.

Rayner's son inherited the phone and is selling it, its paint now peeling to reveal its original synthetic black resin surface.

Andreas Kornfeld of Alexander House told AFP estimates are set based on a number of factors, including "rarity and uniqueness," with the expectation that sale prices will exceed opening bids.

"It would be impossible to find a more impactful relic than the primary tool used by the most evil man in history," the auction house said in a statement. "This was not a staid office

telephone."

"This was Hitler's mobile device of destruction."

Five DB men

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Amirul alleged that the SI had handcuffed him there, taken a few photos and put some Yaba pills in his hands when he rejected to give the money.

Ripon also threatened him with implicating him in false cases, he further alleged.

He was eventually forced to give the money to get rid of the detectives, he said.

Ripon denied the allegations. According to media reports, 76,426 members of Bangladesh Police were punished for their involvement in various crimes and irregularities in five years and eight months as of August 31 last year.

Of them, 551 were dismissed or sacked and 72 faced forced retirement after the allegations against them were proved.

Last year, having failed to contain corruption by policemen at different police stations, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police authorities started a quick search of officers using its counterintelligence unit and found 124 errant SIs and ASIs.

Most of those policemen -- 85 SIs and 39 ASIs -- in the past had used their influence to stop their transfer outside Dhaka, a DMP official said requesting anonymity.

However, it could not be ascertained immediately if the SI and ASI closed yesterday in Joypurhat were transferred from DMP.

Border killing

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top priority to stop border killings.

Killing of Bangladeshi nationals by the BSF goes on unabated for many years despite commitments from top BSF officials to bring down the number of such deaths to zero.

According to the rights body Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), 31 Bangladeshis were killed, 39 injured and 24 abducted by the Indian border guards last year. In the previous three years, the BSF killed 46, 33 and 26 Bangladeshis.

Besides, around 39 people were injured and 24 abducted last year, 73 hurt and 59 abducted in 2015, 63 injured and 110 abducted in 2014 and 84 hurt and 175 abducted in 2013. However, many of the abductees returned home later.

In January this year, the BSF killed two Bangladeshis and abducted nine, said ASK.

Trafficking of drugs, arms and ammunition from India, trespassing the border, development works within 150 yards of the international border, setting up of an effluent treatment plant (ETP) in the Indian side of

Akhaura Integrated Check Post (ICP) and exchange of information about smugglers and criminals would also come up for discussion at the meeting that begins at 9.30am at the BGB headquarters in Palkhona, said a BGB release on Friday.

Led by BSF DG K K Sharma, a 19-member Indian delegation will attend the conference. The delegation members include senior officials of the BSE, and home and foreign affairs ministries. The Indian team arrived in Dhaka yesterday.

On the other hand, BGB Director General Maj Gen Abul Hossain will lead the 28-member Bangladesh side. The team will include officials of the Prime Minister's Office, home and foreign ministries, Joint River Commission, Department of Narcotics Control, Survey of Bangladesh and the Department of Land Record and Survey.

After the conference, a Joint Record of Discussions would be signed by the two sides.

The Indian delegation is scheduled to leave Dhaka on Wednesday.

A good sign

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Abdul Zali, aged 32, of Lalchandpur village in Rangpur sadar, stopped farming tobacco altogether in 2014 when he realised that its smell was affecting his family members.

"Feeling dizzy is a common thing among tobacco farmers," he said.

Ayub Ali, another farmer of the same village, suffered huge loss this year as he tried for the first time to grow potato, other than tobacco, on his 50 decimals of land. His potato field was damaged by late blight, deadly fungal disease of potato plant.

But still he will not go back to tobacco farming because of the risks it poses to public health, Ayub said.

Even two or three years back, vast areas of tobacco fields could be seen on both sides of the highway from Dhaka to Rangpur of Dinajpur but now other crops have occupied portions of them, said Aminul Islam, a schoolteacher of Rangpur, who frequently visit Dinajpur by his motorcycle.

In a recent visit, The Daily Star correspondent saw farmers growing vegetables, wheat, mustard, cotton, potato and maize on their land instead of tobacco.

Nurunnabi Lal, an elderly farmer of Gangachhara upazila, has been producing pumpkins on char area of the Teesta river, where he once produced tobacco.

Asad Mia, of Sarai village under Horagachh upazila, said he began cotton farming instead of tobacco on his three acres of land last year.

"I got profit and am expecting more this season," he said.

Local and international tobacco companies encourage tobacco farming by providing farmers with seeds and fertilisers and purchasing the produce directly from farmers, said farmers who didn't want to be named.

Tonmoy Sanyal, coordinator of the Rajshahi office of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (Bela), said his office had carried out an extensive survey on tobacco farming in Rangpur region.

Bela held several meetings too with farmers to draw their attention to the negative impacts of tobacco farming.

"More farmers would cut down on their tobacco acreage if other organisations come forward to run anti-tobacco farming campaign in the region," Tonmoy said.